

All you need to know about...
The Sacrament of Marriage



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What is it and what is its purpose?

- The Sacrament of Marriage is one of the seven Sacraments of the Church.
- The Sacrament of Marriage is one of the two Sacraments of commitment.
- It is through the Sacrament of Marriage that a man and woman are united as husband and wife in a loving, permanent and exclusive relationship
- In the Sacrament of Marriage the couple publically declare by their own free will that they will they love one another, that they will remain in this relationship forever and that they will welcome the gift of children.
- The Sacrament of Marriage is the ceremony belonging to the Church which validates the couple's intention to be man and wife. There is a legal aspect to the Sacrament of Marriage which is necessary for the marriage to be recognised by the state (certain vows and the signing of the register).
- Wedding Ceremonies which take place outside of the Sacrament of Marriage are not recognised by the Church unless permission has been obtained from the diocesan bishop.

How did the Sacrament of Marriage originate?

- In the story of Creation we are told that God first creates man and then creates woman as "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will give him a suitable companion." (Genesis 2:18). God also says "Be fruitful and increase in number." (Genesis 1:28). Thus it is God's intention that man and woman should be together and, that through their union they should create new life.
- Jesus in his ministry teaches that "What God has joined together, let no man put asunder." (Matthew 19:6) thus reinforcing that the Sacrament of Marriage is intended to be a lifelong commitment.

When does the Sacrament of Marriage take place?

- The Sacrament of Marriage can take place any time in a person's life after they have reached the age of consent.
- The Sacrament of Marriage is usually arranged with the parish priest.
- The Sacrament of Marriage may take place within the celebration of Mass and is sometimes referred to as a Nuptial Mass. The Sacrament of Marriage can also be celebrated as a separate rite outside of the Mass within a celebration of the Liturgy of the Word.

Where does the Sacrament of Marriage take place?

- The Sacrament of Marriage takes place in Church. The couple who are to be married declare their intention and give their consent to Marriage.

Can anyone receive the Sacrament of Marriage?

- Any baptised adult Catholic who is free to do so may receive the Sacrament of Marriage.
- A baptised Catholic who is a widow/widower is free to marry again.
- A baptised Catholic who has previously been married through the Sacrament of Marriage and is legally separated or divorced is not free to marry. If the marriage is annulled by the Church that person may well be free to marry.
- A baptised Catholic who has previously been married through a civil ceremony that has not been recognised by the Church or convalidated and has received a legal divorce is also free to marry in the Church.
- An ordained deacon, priest or bishop is not free to marry. Nor are men and women who have taken religious vows and are part of religious orders.
- The Sacrament of Marriage is valid for couples where one person is of another faith or no faith. In these cases permission must be requested and a dispensation given by the diocesan bishop.

How many times can you receive the Sacrament of Marriage?

- Christian Marriage is understood as a lifelong commitment. There may be circumstances where somebody enters into a second sacramental Marriage recognised by the Church. These may well include a widow or widower who intends to marry another person who the Church understands as being free to marry.
- Other instances may include somebody whose previous sacramental Marriage has been declared null and void by the Church and intends to enter into Marriage with another person who is free to marry.

Who can celebrate the Sacrament of Marriage?

- A priest or a deacon can be the celebrant and preside over the Sacrament of Marriage. However, unlike all the other six sacraments, in the Sacrament of Marriage it is the bride and groom who confer the Sacrament upon each another.

Who has to be present at the Sacrament of Marriage?

- The priest or deacon has to be present as a witness on behalf of the Church. His witness may also be necessary to fulfil the legal obligations on behalf of the state.
- The bride and groom.
- Two witnesses for the register.

Are any special clothes worn?

- For a Nuptial Mass the priest or deacon will be vested in white Mass vestments. At a celebration outside of Mass the priest will wear a cassock and cotta and a white stole. Traditionally, although not part of the Sacrament itself, the bride wears white. The groom and other people attending the celebration are usually dressed up for the occasion.

What happens at the Sacrament of Marriage?

There are differences to the structure of the Liturgy for Sacrament of Marriage according to whether the couple are both Catholic, whether one of the couple has been baptised in another tradition and whether one of the couple is not baptised. The chart below sets out the basic structure of each.

At Mass	Outside of Mass
Introductory Rites <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Entry Song and Procession ☞ Greeting and Welcome ☞ Penitential Act ☞ (Gloria) ☞ Opening Prayer 	Introductory Rites <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Entry and Welcome ☞ Greeting ☞ Exhortation or Prayer
Liturgy of the Word <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ First Reading ☞ Psalm ☞ Second Reading ☞ Gospel ☞ Homily 	Liturgy of the Word <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Two readings with or without Psalm ☞ Gospel ☞ Homily
Liturgy of Marriage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Address ☞ Examination ☞ The Consent ☞ Exchange of ring or rings ☞ General Intercessions ☞ (Creed) ☞ (Completion of Documents) 	Liturgy of Marriage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Address ☞ Examination ☞ The Consent ☞ Exchange of ring or rings ☞ Intercessions and Nuptial Blessing ☞ Our Father ☞ (Sign of Peace) ☞ Documents
Liturgy of Eucharist <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Procession and Preparation of the Gifts ☞ Prayer over the Gifts ☞ Wedding Preface ☞ Eucharistic Prayer ☞ Our Father ☞ Nuptial Blessing ☞ Sign of Peace ☞ Communion: Communion Song ☞ Prayer after Communion ☞ (Completion of Documents) 	
Concluding Rite <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Blessing and Dismissal 	Concluding Rite <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☞ Blessing and Dismissal

Please note that many different customs and traditions surround marriage but they are not actually part of the Sacrament of Marriage itself. Similarly, the legal aspects of the marriage, such as the vows, will differ according to the country where the wedding is taking place.

- ☞ It is common custom in this country for the priest and groom, at the foot of the sanctuary, and guests to await the entrance of the bride. In some Churches the bride and groom may be each asked to light a candle placed on opposite ends of the altar which represents their individuality. Once they are married the couple then light a central candle using the flames from both candles to symbolise their unity.
- ☞ A more recent custom is for there to be a candle on the sanctuary to represent deceased parent/s of the couple.
- ☞ Another tradition is for the bride to wear a veil over her face and to have it lifted from her face once she is beside the groom.

The Rite of Marriage

- ☞ Following the Introductory Rites and the Liturgy of the Word, the priest invites the couple to stand where he asks them particular questions and where they make specific declarations. During the last declaration the couple join their right hands.

The scripture texts used will be from a selection which speaks of God's intention for men and women to be united through the Sacrament of Marriage, the meaning of love, the importance of fidelity and marriage as an everlasting bond.

The questions asked are to ensure that the couple are free to marry under the law and that they are freely willing to marry for life. The question about children is not asked if the couple are beyond child-bearing age. The declarations are necessary for the legal requirements of the state to be met.

The joining of hands is to symbolise the unity of the couple: they are as one.

- ☞ The priest blesses the ring/s and they are placed on the third finger of the left hand, first by the husband and then by the wife.
- ☞ Following the Prayers of the Faithful the registers are signed.

The actual moment when the Sacrament is conferred: when the bride and groom declare their consent to become husband and wife. The blessing and exchange of rings is a sign of the consent so freely given.

The rings symbolise eternal love and faithfulness. They also provide a visual sign to all that they are now married. Note that from this point forward they are referred to as husband and wife and no longer bride and groom.

The signing of the register is a legal requirement.

☞ The priest gives Nuptial Blessing following the Our Father.

The beliefs and teachings of the Church are expressed in the words of this blessing. God is recognised as the creator and that men and women are called by him to live together in the union of marriage. The blessing also contains messages of hope: that they will live according to the Gospel; that they 'live to see your children's children' a quotation taken from the Old Testament psalms (in the case of older couples this part is omitted) and that after living a long life they enter into heaven.

☞ The priest gives the final blessing.

If you'd like to find out more about the Sacrament of Marriage you can ...

- watch a short film clip featuring Bishop Christopher Coyne on the Catholic TV Network from a series of talks 'Everything you wanted to know about Catholic Liturgy' www.catholictv.com/shows/everything-you-wanted-know-about-catholic-liturgy/why-must-catholics-marry-catholic-church
- watch a short film clip on www.bustedhalo.com/video/matrimony-why-make-it-catholic
- read more about it in 'Youcat' ('Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church') available from CTS
- read more about it in the 'Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church' available from CTS
- read more in 'The Catholic Source Book' Harcourt Religion Publishers

Rite of Marriage

If the Marriage is taking place within Mass the Rite of Marriage begins after the Introductory Rite and the first part of the Liturgy of the Word up to and including the Homily has been said.

The priest invites everyone to stand including the Bride and Bridegroom who are standing at the front of the sanctuary.

The priest addresses the couple using their first names only:

Priest: N. and N. you have come together in this church so that the Lord may seal and strengthen your love in the presence of the Church's minister and this community. Christ abundantly blesses this love. He has already consecrated you in baptism and now he enriches you and strengthens you by a special sacrament so that you may assume the duties of marriage in mutual and lasting fidelity. And so in the presence of the Church, I ask you to state your intentions.

The priest then asks the following questions using only first names to which the couple respond one after the other starting with the Bridegroom.

Priest: N. and N. I shall now ask you if you freely undertake the obligations of marriage, and to state that there is no legal impediment to your marriage.

Are you ready freely and without reservation to give yourselves to each other in marriage?

Bridegroom: I am.

Bride: I am.

Priest: Are you ready to love and honour each other as man and wife for the rest of your lives?

Bridegroom: I am.

Bride: I am.

Priest: Are you ready to accept children lovingly from God, and bring them up according to the law of Christ and his Church?

Bridegroom: I am.

Bride: I am.

The couple now have to make the following declarations in turn. This may be read or repeated after the priest. Because it is a legal part of the ceremony the couple must use full names including surnames.

Bridegroom: I do solemnly declare that I know not of any lawful impediment why I, N.N. may not be joined in matrimony to N.N.

Bride: I do solemnly declare that I know not of any lawful impediment why I, N.N. may not be joined in matrimony to N.N.

Consent

Priest: Since it is your intention to enter into marriage, declare your consent before God and his Church.

Priest: N.N. will you take N.N. here present for your lawful wife, according to the rite of our holy Mother the Church?

Bridegroom: I will.

Priest: N.N. will you take N.N. here present for your lawful husband, according to the rite of our holy Mother the Church?

Bride: I will.

The Bride and Bridegroom join their right hands. The Bride's hand may be placed by the person giving her away.

Bridegroom: I call upon these persons here present to witness that I, N.N. do take thee N.N. to be my lawful wedded wife to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part.

The couple separate their hands for a moment before re-joining them.

Bride: I call upon these persons here present to witness that I, N.N. do take thee N.N. to be my lawful wedded husband to have and to hold from this day forward, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part.

Priest: You have declared your consent before the Church. May the Lord in his goodness strengthen your consent and fill you both with his blessings. What God has joined together, let no man put asunder.

All: Amen.

Blessing and Exchange of Rings

The priest now blesses the ring/s.

Priest: May the Lord bless these rings which you give to each other as the sign of your love and fidelity.

All: Amen.

The husband places the ring on his wife's finger and using her first name says:

Husband: N. take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

If he is receiving a ring the wife places the ring on her husband's finger and using his first name says:

Wife: N. take this ring as a sign of my love and fidelity. In the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

The Mass now continues with the Prayer of the Faithful. After this the register is signed and then the Mass proceeds through the Liturgy of the Eucharist into the Communion Rite until the Our Father has been said.

The Nuptial Blessing

Priest: My dear friends, let us turn to the Lord and pray that he will bless with his grace this woman/or N. now married in Christ to this man/or N. and that through the sacrament of the body and blood of Christ, he will unite in love the couple he has joined in this holy bond.

The first paragraph is chosen according to the readings used earlier.

Priest: Father, by your power you have made everything out of nothing. In the beginning you created the universe and made mankind in your own likeness. You gave man the constant help of woman so that man and woman should no longer be two, but one flesh, and you teach us that what you have united may never be divided.

or

Father, you have made the union of man and wife so holy a mystery that it symbolises the marriage of Christ his Church.

or

Father, by your plan man and woman are united, and married life has been established as the one blessing that was not forfeited by original sin or washed away in the flood.

Priest: Look upon this woman, your daughter, now joined to her husband in marriage. She asks your blessing.

Give her the grace of love and peace. May she always follow the example of the holy women whose praises are sung in the scriptures.

May her husband put his trust in her and recognise that she is her equal and the heir with him to the life of grace. May he always honour her and love her as Christ loves his bride, the Church.

Father, keep them always true to your commandments. Keep them faithful in marriage and let them be living examples of Christian life. Give them the strength which comes from the gospel so that they may be witnesses of Christ to others. Bless them with children and help them to be good parents. May they live to see their children's children. And, after a happy old age, grant them fullness of life with the saints in the kingdom of heaven.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

The Mass continues from the Sign of Peace through to Holy Communion after which the priest says the following prayer.

Priest: Let us Pray. Lord, in your love you have given us this Eucharist to unite us with one another and with you. As you have made N. and N. one in this Sacrament of marriage and in the sharing of the one bread and one cup, so now make them one in love for each other.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

All: Amen.

Concluding Rite

Blessing at the end of Mass

Priest: The Lord be with you.

All: And with your spirit.

The priest first blesses the couple:

Priest: God the eternal Father keep you in love for each other, so that the peace of Christ may stay with you and be always in your home.

All: Amen.

Priest: May your children bless you, your friends console you and all men live in peace with you.

All: Amen.

Priest: May you always bear witness to the love of God in the world so that the afflicted and needy will find in you generous friends, and welcome you into the joys of heaven.

All: Amen.

The priest then gives the final blessing and dismissal to all present.